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High School Commencements

By

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State Supervisor of High Schools



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HIGH SCHOOL COMMENCEMENTS

In every community where there is a high school, the annual high school commencement is one of the most important events in all the year. In many communities it is the one occasion in the year that brings the people together in a general community gathering. It is, therefore, an event that should be prepared for carefully and celebrated properly.

There are perhaps three definite purposes that ought to be accomplished through the high school commencement exercises. The first of these is to celebrate in a suitable

way the graduation of pupils who have completed satisfactorily a prescribed course of study; the second is to bring before the people of the community definite, tangible evidence that the high school is a profitable community investment; and the third is to serve as an inspiration and a spur to the pupils in the lower high school classes and in the grammar grades. Practically all exercises connected with the high school commencement should, therefore, lend themselves to the accomplishment of one or the other or of all these purposes. Too often there is a manifest lack of plan and purpose in high school commencements. They are held apparently because custom requires that they be held, and nothing more definite is attempted than to furnish to the audience an evening's entertainment and to afford the members of the graduating class an opportunity to appear in perhaps too expensive clothes.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE OB-
SERVANCE OF HIGH SCHOOL
COMMENCEMENTS

Class Invitations

The commencement invitations sent out by the members of the graduating class to their friends need not be elaborate or very expensive. A plain engraved invitation containing nothing in the way of decoration but the school monogram neatly stamped on the face of the invitation at the top, is in very good taste and is recommended. Ribbons and cords used as binders or elaborate decorations of any kind cheapen the appearance of an invitation and reflect upon the taste of the members of the class. The invitation may give the class motto, the class colors and the name of the sponsor of the class, if there be one. The class roll may also be printed on the invitation, if the class is very small. If the class is large, the class roll may be

printed separately and enclosed with the invitation.

Graduating Costumes

Very often, in the case of girl graduates, particularly, graduation from high school is rendered so expensive as to be burdensome to the parents of some of the graduates, by the foolish idea that the graduate must have an elaborate and expensive gown for the occasion. Both parents and teachers should do everything possible to discourage this idea. It not only entails needless expense, but it causes embarrassment and pain to some graduates who must appear in plain clothes by the side of classmates whose parents are able to dress them in expensive graduating gowns. Recently it has become the custom in many high schools in which sewing is taught to require all girls in the graduating class to make their own graduating dresses. This is an appropriate and commendable custom. The gray cap

and gown are also used in many schools and have much to commend them. They form a costume that is distinctive and scholastic in appearance; and they are inexpensive, since they may be rented from firms that carry a supply of them for that purpose. The cap and gown eliminate the necessity of a special dress for commencement.

Graduating Performances

When high school graduates are required to prepare graduating essays or orations, their productions should be original; the subjects selected should be within the grasp of the pupil and the productions should be prepared carefully and well. They should grow out of some phase of high school work in which the pupil has been particularly interested and with which he has become familiar. It is a painful experience to hear a seventeen-year-old high school girl read a long "original" essay on some abstract ques-

tion of government or diplomacy expressed in the language of Benjamin Franklin or John Hay. And yet one hears that sort of thing almost every commencement season in some high schools. The principals who permit it are presuming perilously upon the intelligence and the patience of their patrons. Pupils should be required to practice their commencement performances under the direction of a teacher until they can deliver them in a creditable manner. Too many performances of this kind are delivered in a singsong, slipshod style that indicates lack of preparation and training.

The Place of Holding Commencement Exercises

In many places the high school commencement exercises must be held in churches or halls. If possible an auditorium should be secured that will accommodate all who will attend the exercises. An auditorium situated near railroad

tracks or other sources of much noise should be avoided. The auditorium should be suitably decorated with the colors of the class and with flowers and plants. In some schools it is the custom for the Junior class to constitute the decorating committee. Where this is not the custom a decorating committee should be appointed. The principal should see that the plans and arrangements of the decorating committee are definitely made a sufficient length of time in advance to insure the satisfactory performance of their work. The ushers should be instructed beforehand as to the best way of seating the auditorium, where additional seats may be placed, what seats are to be reserved for special purposes, and other duties they are expected to perform. The auditorium should be well aired before the arrival of the audience and should be properly ventilated while the exercises are going on.

The Program

Naturally practice varies considerably among high schools as to the make-up and arrangement of the commencement program. In some schools it is the custom to make it exclusively a class program, having each member of the graduating class take part and having no outside speaker for the occasion. In some other schools an address is provided for in addition to performances by all the members of the class. There are some objections to both these types of program. The second type is particularly objectionable. It is necessarily very long; the audience is almost certain to become tired and lose interest. If the speaker who is to deliver the class address is reserved for the latter part of the program, as he usually is on such programs, he is at a great disadvantage. Both he and the audience are tired and his message is likely to be poorly delivered and poorly received. At a certain commencement

program of this kind held at night, the speaker, who had traveled nearly a hundred and fifty miles to deliver an address to the graduating class, was introduced to the audience at fifteen minutes till eleven o'clock. He spoke a few words of congratulation to the graduating class and sat down with the explanation that the hour was too late for an address. He would have manifested exceedingly poor judgment if he had done otherwise. But what about the judgment of the person responsible for the arrangement of the program?

Usually it is better at the graduating exercises to have an address by a capable speaker than to have a program made up entirely of performances by members of the class, particularly if a speaker can be secured who will bring a message of inspiration to the class and the people of the community. Two or three members of the class may then be chosen to represent the class on the program.

The productions of the class poet, the class prophet and the class "growler" should not form a part of the graduating program. These should be included in the "class-day" exercises which should form a separate program. A very common practice among high schools is to have the "Class-day" exercises in the afternoon of commencement day and the graduating exercises at night.

The following program is suggested as a type suitable for high school commencements. It will easily permit modification, of course, to meet the requirements of local conditions.

Music—High School orchestra or other music.

Invocation—A local minister.

Music—High School glee club or other music.

Address—A member of the graduating class as Salutatorian, 5 to 8 minutes.

Address—A speaker secured for the occasion. 30 to 45 minutes.

Music—High school chorus, instrumental or vocal solo or other music.

Address—A member of the graduating class as Valedictorian. 5 to 8 minutes.

Address—The principal of the school referring to the work of the year, plans for the ensuing year, etc. 5 to 8 minutes.

Presentation of diplomas—The president of the board of education or some one designated by him.

Announcement of medals, prizes, honors, etc.

Miscellaneous Suggestions

All arrangements for commencement should be made in good time. The speaker should be engaged, if an address is to be delivered, and the place of holding the exercises should be determined upon, several weeks in advance. If these matters are delayed, it may be found that someone else has engaged the speaker desired and that the auditorium has been let for other purposes.

A definite understanding should be had beforehand with the speaker concerning the amount of his compensation, if he is to receive com-

pensation for his services, and concerning the payment of his expenses. This will prevent embarrassments that sometimes arise from neglecting to arrange these matters beforehand. And it is not out of place to say here that ordinarily persons who render such services may not unreasonably expect to receive compensation in the way of a fee or honorarium. Certainly in no case should a speaker be expected to serve without compensation and pay his own expenses.

The speaker should, if possible, inform the principal of the school at what hour he expects to arrive. He should be met at the train by the principal or someone representing him. Someone should also be designated to call at the speaker's hotel and accompany him to the place where the commencement exercises are to be held.

The speaker should be informed beforehand concerning the length of time allotted to his address.

The person who introduces the speaker need not make a lengthy speech of introduction.

The exercises should begin promptly on the hour announced and should be conducted throughout with promptness. When those who have part in the program are late in arriving and when the program is lifeless and drags, the people wish they had stayed at home. A gentleman well known and much respected in West Virginia remarked some time ago, "A high school principal may be judged by the way he handles his commencement exercises"; and this gentleman was right.

The graduating class should be instructed to rise when addressed by the person who is to present the diplomas.

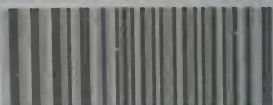
The commencement exercises should be fully and definitely announced through the local newspapers.

In some rural high schools commencement day is made the occasion

for a general community gathering. An invitation is extended to all the people of the district and families are requested to bring lunch baskets. The graduating exercises are held in the forenoon, a picnic dinner is served at noon, and "Class-day" exercises and athletic contests are held in the afternoon. This plan is an excellent one and it is hoped that more rural high schools will adopt it. A special invitation should be extended to the pupils in the upper grades of the rural schools throughout the district. It is from their number that the high school enrollment is to be recruited.

If a sermon is preached to the graduating class on the Sunday before commencement day, do not call it a "baccalaureate sermon". A "baccalaureate sermon" is preached to those about to receive degrees and is a college term, not a high school term. The sermon to the graduating class of a high school may be referred to as a "class sermon."

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